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Montreal inside out — Walk No. 3: Offbeat Old Montreal

By BONNIE BUXTON AND BETTY GUERNSEY for The Gazette

There are Montrealers who only visit Old Montreal when their relations come to town for a visit. But why should tourists have all the fun? In the style of an old European city, Old Montreal is honeycombed with small streets, interesting vistas, quaint old (and not-so-old) shops, and the occasional beautifully restored and lived-in house.

If you've never taken the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts tour, given each Wednesday in summer, try to make time for it. The 90-minute walking tour, which leaves at 11 a.m. from Place Vauquelin, just east of City Hall, varies slightly from guide to guide, and some Montrealers have taken the tour six times and learned something new each time.

(Our guide, for example, was a history buff — but yours might turn out to be an expert on architecture.)

The City of Montreal tourist office in the old Palais de Justice has a good printed walking tour of Old Montreal, which you can follow. Both the Museum and the City walks explain about many historic sites in detail, so we'll simply list these with the note (HS).

Start your Offbeat Tour at (1) **City Hall,** (HS), and walk east along Notre Dame noting (s) the **Chateau de Ramezay,** 290 Notre Dame East (HS) and (3) the **Maison de Beaulieu** (HS) now housing l'Amphitryon Restaurant.

(4) **Bonsecours Street** is loaded with things to see. There are, of course, the restored **Papineau House** (HS) at 440, and next door, in the basement, the **Boutique Soleil** (430) with its fine weavings, crocheted clothes, and enamel-buckled belts by de Passile-Sylvestre. At 417 note the peculiar wooden figure staring out the window from behind the curtains. The figure changes from time to time — and we're mystified. North of Notre Dame in the cellar of 515 is the most offbeat shop of all, the **Witch's Cave,** where you can buy graveyard dust, balm of gilead buds, broom tops, mugwort, mandrake root, love oil, lust oil, get-away-from-me oil and religious statues, many with their heads mysteriously missing.

Continue east along the north side of Notre Dame between Bonsecours and Berri, noting (5) the row of boutiques and shops. At **Dominion Crests,** 407, you can have crests and motifs printed on everything from T-shirts to flags. You'll see craftsmen at work at 415, **Les Choses des Bois** (creating handcrafted wooden furniture) and at 427-433, **Centre Ceramique** (potters). Upstairs at 421 is **Au Pierrot Gourmet,** famous for good food and amusingly tacky atmosphere.

Across the street at 452 is the attractive stone building housing the **Union Nationale Belgique.** Next door at the corner of Berri, is (6) the one-time residence of Quebec's Father of Confederation, **Sir Georges Etienne-Cartier** (HS).

Wander down Berri and stroll west on St. Paul noting (7) the nicely restored buildings and peculiar gaping hole on this street. At 453-5, peek through to the grassy courtyard in back, complete with geraniums in hanging pots.

Make a left turn at Bonneau and walk down to Rue des Commissioners, walking west to take in the back view of (8) **Notre Dame de Bonsecours Church** (HS) and (9) **Bonsecours Market** (HS), both far more interesting from this angle, we think, than as seen from St. Paul Street.

At the west end of Bonsecours Market, make a right turn and climb back up to St. Paul, noting (10) the abandoned **Rasco's Hotel** (HS). (Steinberg's, why don't you turn it into a super groceteria, so that area residents won't have to travel for miles to stock their larders?)

Continuing west along St. Paul, you might make a rest stop at (11) **Brasserie des Fortifications,** at 252, the only place in Montreal where you can see the old wall, built in 1716.

Or make a jog up Place Jacques-Cartier, and turn right into the courtyard housing (12) **Le Navigateur Creperie,** where you can enjoy crêpes ranging in price from 75¢ to $4.00 for crêpes flambées au Grand Marnier.

(We chose the $1.49 special — a lunchtime special stuffed with cheese, ham, onions tomatoes and chicken.)

Continue west along St. Paul to Place Royale, noting (13) the eclectic series of oldfangled and artsy-crafty shops. At **Hans Klein's** artists' co-op, corner of St. Paul and St. Vincent, check out John and Carol Dolligan's batik silk caftans priced from $27 to $40. At 92 St. Paul East, there's **Hector Lamontagne Leather,** in business for 105 years, selling saddles, bridles, bits, riding boots — and the best leather skins in North America, one California craftsman informs us. At **Detour,** there are hand-painted pebbles by Anna Vogtesh and super framed blowup photos of pop stars by Henry J. Kahanek. At the northwest corner of St. Paul and St. Vincent, watch for the hand-painted wall advertising for **Utility Garments,** featuring a Wonder Woman nurse and a Bazz Baxter busboy.

There's **Le Vieux Demase** at 104 St. Paul East, young Quebec's newest night spot, and the **Old Spaghetti Warehouse** at No. 29, with an appropriately high-carbo menu. At **Merchants Awning,** No. 24, a 50-year-old shop, you can buy 3' x 6' flags, silkscreened to your own design, for $25.

Note, also, **Leon Courey and Co.,** a four storey mini-department store (good bed linens) and **Henri Jonas,** 139 St. Paul West, the wholesale importer, established 1870, with its original 19th century signs in the window and a truly Dickensian interior.

Nip around (14) Place Royale (HS) and continue along Rue de la Commune, noting (15) **Joe Beef's Tavern,** "the oldest and largest house on the waterfront." (When are they going to turn it into a brasserie?)

(16) is the tidy greystone building, No. 215, the studio and shop of weaver Karen Bulow: Visitors Welcome. A few steps west is (17) the **Playwrights' Workshop** at No. 329, featuring Medea until August 18.

(18) is the Victorian Building at 2 St. Pierre housing the **Montreal Mariners' Clinic,** and (19) is the elegant old mansion at 347 de la Commune leased by the **Chinese Resource Products** of the People's Republic. (Best buy — enamelled butterfly brooches at only $4.95.)

Turning north on St. Pierre, watch for (20) **Architectural Antiques** at 119, where you can buy mantels, doors, windows and other treasures rescued from demolished houses.

Make a right turn at (21) the **Central Fire Station** and continue to the courtyard of (22) **Youville Stables** (HS), where you can enjoy a cooling drink at **Gibby's.**

Walk east along Place d'Youville to Saint-Nicholas, and jog up to St. Paul, noting (23) the building at the northwest corner of St. Nicolas, housing **M. Caya and Co. Fur Machinery** with its original gold lettering; and the bicycle shop, **Le Roi de la Pédale,** where you can rent a bike for 25 cents an hour.

Make a left turn at St. Francois-Xavier, watching out for (24) the old stock exchange building, now being renovated for **Centaur Theatre,** and the good little restaurant **Au Vieux Carrefour,** across the street.

At Notre Dame Street, walk east past (25) the **St. Sulpice Seminary** (HS), (26) **Notre-Dame Church** (HS), and (27) Place d'Armes (HS). At St. Sulpice Street, make a detour past **Stash's Restaurant** to (28) **Galeries de la Place d'Armes,** an arcade of shops and offices in a building whose beams date back to 1706 and were originally in the Grey Nun Hospital at Place d'Youville. Most notable here: **Simone Roy's** one-of-a-kind bookbinding.

Returning to Notre Dame, browse through the row of shops just west of St. Lawrence. At **Desmarais and Robitaille,** No. 60, ogle the paper-mâché marionettes handmade by Rosemarie Oberholzer. At **Les Filles de St. Paul,** No. 33, you'll find good French children's books, and at **Fournier's,** established 1890, No. 17, you'll find good, reasonable luggage and handbags. At **Le Sceau de l'Art,** a pocket-sized shop, Transylvania-born Emil Smutny engraves jewellery, die-cut medals, rubber stamps and three-dimensional sculptures.

Across from (30) the new **Palais de Justice** is (31) the **Magasin de Surplus,** with good buys in gun racks, gas masks, old boots, World War I helmets, canteens, string underwear and sailor middies (only 92 cents).

Check out the most recent exhibit at (33) the **Maison des Arts de la Sauvegarde,** and stumble back to your starting point at City Hall.

Richard vs. Charles

The price of power: historical perspective

On January 30, 1649, Oliver Cromwell's men executed King Charles I of England. People forget that King Charles had an impeachment trial. It was a rough trial indeed. Much more crude and fast than anything that may be in store for Richard Nixon. Joel McCormick, publications officer at Sir George Williams University, has loaned us a prize from his collection of old books. It's the Grand National History of England, 1815. From it, we exerpt the following account of the first impeachment trial.

A declaration was published, containing the blackest calumnies against the king, to blast his character; and many additional reproaches were propagated on the king's conduct, not contained in that paper, that he had poisoned his father, betrayed Rochelle, and devised the Irish massacre.

No sooner had these proceedings occurred, than Hammond received orders from the army to dismiss all the king's servants, to limit his correspondence with his friends and to confine him more closely. Yet the independents did not enjoy their extorted power with much tranquility, as combinations and conspiracies were everywhere forming. . . .

Tumults, insurrections, and conspiracies, disturbed every part of the kingdom; and the prevalence of the military over the civil power, and the subjection of king and parliament to the caprices of a mercenary army, filled the minds of men with the utmost indignation. . . .

A committee was next named to frame charges against the king; and, on receiving the report, they voted it high treason in a king to levy war against his parliament, and appointed a high court of justice for the trial of Charles Stewart, though the peers unanimously rejected it.

But this obstacle was soon removed by a vote of the junto commons, "that the people are the origin of all just power, and that the commons of England, assembled in parliament, being chosen by the people, and representing them, have the supreme authority of the nation, and that whatsoever is enacted and declared law by the commons, hath the force of law, without the consent of the king or house of peers."

The king had arrived in the Isle of Wight about the 12th of November, 1647; and, after a variety of treatment, being first deprived of his chaplains, and, in about three months, of his friends and companions, his walks were afterwards confined to the lines of the castle.

An attempt for procuring the king's escape had failed from the narrowness of the window by which he was to have descended. Another effort was then designed by eating away the iron bar of the window. This also failed, from the discovery of more persons under it than were expected, which convinced the king that his intention had been betrayed.

On the 19th of January, 1649 he was conveyed to St. James's, and for the first time, on the following day, arraigned before the pretended high court of justice. When conducted to a chair within the bar, he seated himself without removing his hat and surveyed his judges with dignified contempt. The solicitor then stated, in the name of the commons, in the form of an indictment, that:

"Charles Stewart, being admitted King of England, and intrusted with a limited power, had nevertheless, from a wicked design, to erect an unlimited and tyrannical government, traitorously and maliciously levied war against the present parliament, and the people whom they represented; and was therefore impeached as a tyrant, traitor, murderer, and a public and implacable enemy to the commonwealth."

The charge was no sooner read, than the president informed the king that the court expected his answer, when Charles, with a composed firmness objected to its authority. . . . He expected to be restored to his power, dignity, and revenue, as well as his personal liberty; but in these objects he was egregiously disappointed.

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like a toad, ugly and venemous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything
— *William Shakespeare, 1600*

. . . The president contended that the king must submit to the authority of his judges, as delegated by the people, the only source of lawful power; and that sovereigns themselves act only in trust from that community, which had invested this high court which its present jurisdiction.

Three attempts were made to induce him to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the court, but to no purpose; yet . . . on the fourth day they examined some witnesses to prove that he had been in arms against the forces of parliament.

On this evidence . . . sentence was pronounced that he should suffer death as a tyrant, traitor, murder, and public enemy, by severing his head from his body.

Neither was any remarkable emotion discovered in his looks or jesture at this extraordinary sentence, only looking down, with an apparent mixture of pity and contempt on these efforts of malice and iniquity.

An interval of three days was allowed before his execution, which he passed with much tranquility being chiefly occupied with reading and devotion. His nights were passed in the most serene repose, notwithstanding the noise of workmen, continually sounding in his ears in framing the scaffold for his execution.

Much compassion was manifested for the king's unfortunate condition, both before and after his condemnation; but to no purpose.

. . . One soldier, seized by a contagious sympathy, now displayed by the people, was compelled to offer up a prayer to heaven for a blessing on oppressed majesty. Being overheard by his officer, he was struck to the ground in the king's presence; on which the monarch said, "The punishment, methinks, exceeds the offense."

In the moment of his final departure, he conducted himself with dignity and decency; and on account of the severity of the weather, took a small refreshment of bread and wine; and, to prevent the appearance of any cold shivering, which would be misinterpreted into a want of courage or conscious guilt, an additional shirt had been used for the awful occasion.

He forgave all his enemies, not accepting the principal instruments of his death; by advising them and the whole nation to resolve the constitution of the kingdom, by paying obedience to their lawful sovereign, his son and successor.

He then submitted his neck to the block, and at one stroke his executioner, concealed by a visor, severed his head from his body; another, similarly concealed, taking up the head immediately, streaming with blood, and exclaiming, "This is the head of a traitor."

At the horrid sight the spectators expressed their grief and astonishment by a flood of tears; and the whole nation, on receiving intelligence of this fatal execution, were stuck with horror and consternation.

It had been observed that the king, at the very moment before the fatal blow, had earnestly expressed the word, "Remember," under which the generals suspected some great mystery was concealed; but, on the bishop's explanation, it was found to mean no more than to inculcate on his son the forgiveness of the murderers, as he had often urgently recommended, and now finally, at the instant of his death emphatically enforced.

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